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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 003196

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS
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SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: THE POLICE SEARCH FOR
SYNCHRONICITY

REF: A. A) BANGKOK 03179 (SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: SENIOR THAI
OFFICIALS BRIEF EAP DAS JOHN)

[1](#)B. B) BANGKOK 03192 (SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: MAY 17-18
VISIT TO FAR SOUTH)

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RALPH L. BOYCE. REASON 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. While the Royal Thai Army has moved to reassert its traditional role of managing security in the restive South, the Royal Thai "provincial" police remain the foundation for investigating, arresting and prosecuting militants. Over the past two years, senior Thai officials have moved from denial to admitting that there is a serious problem in the South. As reported in refs, they are beginning to admit that RTG efforts in the South are hamstrung by a lack of coordination, poor skills in some units, and a lack of efforts to win the support of the local public. Police officials in the South, however, believe that they are making headway through better intelligence derived from jailed suspects, improved cooperation with the Army and nascent efforts to win the population's "hearts and minds." This cable takes a more in-depth look at the role of the local police, their cooperation with other parts of the RTG, some recent successes, and their internal shortcomings. End Summary.

THE FORCES ON THE GROUND

[1](#)2. (C) The RTG has not been shy about committing resources to the South. Nearly 45,000 soldiers and police are operating in a region approximately the size of Connecticut. Military forces totaling approximately 35,000 troops fall under the command of the 4th Army, headquartered in Nakhon Si Thammarat. The 5th Infantry Division (five regiments) and the 15th Development Division (three regiments) totaling approximately 20,000 troops are the main units of the 4th Army. About 15,000 other military forces are assigned to the South, including three Marine Battalions, Special Forces units detailed from the Special Warfare Command at Lopburi (Task Force 90), and additional forces redirected from the Third Army Area in the Northwest. Each province has at least one regiment of Rangers--irregular paramilitary forces recruited from the local population.

[1](#)3. (C) The Royal Thai Police (RTP) provide the backbone of law and order in the South. Often referred to as the "provincial police," these are the local cops charged with administering speeding tickets, investigating petty crimes and the other quotidian acts of day-to-day law enforcement. The provincial police are also the cornerstone of anti-separatist efforts. They are often the first on the scene and the only law enforcement agency with a full time presence in all three provinces

[1](#)4. (C) The three southernmost provinces are grouped into police Region IX. There are about 2,300 provincial police in Yala, 2,500 in Pattani, and 3,500 in Narathiwat. These police are augmented by the Royal Thai Border Patrol police, almost 1,500 provincial police from other provinces, and officers from the Bangkok-based RTP Special Branch (SB) and RTP Criminal Suppression Division (CSD). Additionally, the Ministry of Justice's relatively new Department of Special Investigations (DSI), also based in the capital, has been active in several specific cases in the South, but does not have a full-time presence in the area.

[1](#)5. (C) The Region IX forward operating command in Yala is charged with overseeing all police activities in the three southern provinces and draws upon other police units for expertise. The head of the command's special raid unit is a Colonel from CSD, and the chief of the RTP's forensic lab in Bangkok routinely travels to Yala to assist in investigations. Police stations are often collocated with the local administrative headquarters at the provincial, district and sub-district levels. Forensic labs in each of the three provinces support field operations, though complicated work such as DNA analysis must be done at the central police forensic lab in Bangkok.

COORDINATION IS THE COMPLICATION

16. (C) Military and police forces are coordinated under the Southern Border Provinces Peace Building Command (SBPPC), which is led by the Supreme Commander of the 4th Army Region, GEN Ongkorn Tongprasom. The SBPPC was established in April 2004 and charged with coordinating all security, civil affairs and administrative work in the three restive provinces. This was not the first such coordinating body in the South; the RTG established the Southern Border Administrative Center (SBAC) in the 1980's to counter the separatist movement. The SBAC served as the preeminent governing body in the South, with the ability to remove corrupt officials and determine local budgets. It was not, however, a strictly security-focused organization. The SBAC worked hand in hand with Civil Military Police Task Force 43 (CMP 43), which served as the focal point for security forces. SBAC and CMP 43 were dissolved by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in May 2002.

17. (C) Following the upsurge in violence in 2004, the SBPPC was established in the hope of capturing the magic of SBAC and CMP 43. According to Ministry of Interior (MOI) officials in Yala who served under both systems, however, the SBPPC is almost entirely focused on security affairs--like the old CMP 43--to the detriment of civil, political and administrative issues. Moreover, the SBPPC does not have the clear lines of authority, coordination and bureaucratic support to optimize operations in the South. (Note. As reported in ref A, Deputy Prime Minister Chidchai appears to understand this problem and plans to establish a joint center for administering a campaign to win "hearts and minds." End Note.)

18. (C) The delineation of police and military responsibilities is not so clear on the ground. According to Region IX police officials, the Army has the lead in rural portions of the South, with urban and major roads under police control. This can lead to confusion when units respond to a bombing or attack. Although the Army has no role in investigating such attacks, Army units are sometimes the first on the scene. According to Maj. Gen. Amporn Charuchinda, the deputy police commissioner for Region IX, the police have given Army units some training in evidence collection, but military units will often fail to share evidence with the police, instead presenting it to senior Army officials.

SOME BETTER COORDINATION WITH ARMY...

19. (C) Region IX police point to at least one area of increased cooperation with the Army, however. RTG officials have been frustrated by several incidents when, in an attempt by police to arrest suspects, local villagers either block security forces from entering the village, or take hostages to force the release of those suspects. According to GEN Amporn, the police are increasingly working with the Army and MOI officials to try and prevent these incidents. Amporn said that when making an arrest in one of these "red zone" villages, a company size army unit will cordon off the surrounding area before a twelve-man tactical police team goes into the village to make the arrest. MOI officials are often used to coordinate raids with local village officials, and to act as translators, in areas where villagers refuse or are unable to speak Thai with security officials. (Note: This coordination seems to have broken down during the botched May 19 arrest in Narathiwat when local villagers reacted to an arrest by holding two government teachers hostage before severely beating them. End Note). Police units are also requesting Army blocking movements--in the form of concentric rings centered on crime scenes, one, three and seven kilometers in diameter--in the hopes of catching perpetrators on the run.

...AND PROSECUTORS

10. (C) Police officials also have been frustrated by what they see as poor cooperation from local prosecutors. Not a single militant has been successfully prosecuted yet. According to Amporn, the problem lies in the short duration of prosecutor assignments--prosecutors rotate into new positions every year. That said, Amporn is hopeful that the recent visit of the chief prosecutor for the South to Yala will result in better cooperation.

POLICE CONFIDENT THEY ARE IMPROVING

11. (C) GEN Amporn and his subordinates confidently assess that they are getting a handle on the separatist movement; "we know who they are now." Amporn cited the lack of attacks on police sites in 2006 as evidence that the insurgents are not as bold anymore. The authorities granted under the

emergency decree (renewed every three months) allow the police to detain suspects much more easily. Amporn said that the police now have the names of 500 suspected militants and have already arrested 200 suspects. These suspects are now providing valuable information during interviews and through their "pocket litter" and other physical evidence. These leads have given the police a better sense of the militants' tactics and organization. According to Amporn, the militants prefer to set up a safe house within one kilometer of an attack site, and often stash an extra set of clothing along their escape route to change into while fleeing the scene. The police have found military uniforms cached in this manner. Some suspects even dress as women so as to evade capture.

12. (C) Some of Amporn's newfound information on the insurgency is a bit questionable. In Amporn's view, the militants are growing "frustrated" and "bored" because their operations over the past two years have failed to produce results. Amporn also believes that some militants cloak their activities under the cover of pick-up soccer games--the insurgents favor a six-man operational unit, and local soccer teams have seven players each. According to Amporn, the leaders of the insurgency are Thai-Malay dual nationals who use different names on each side of the border so as to elude authorities.

13. (C) Amporn was blunt in stating that his first priority is to improve basic police capabilities. His forward command in Yala is also one of the three police training centers in the South and he has pushed to re-train almost 10,000 active police in basic skills already. Amporn and his subordinates expressed interest in possible USG training assistance but cautioned that any training must be conducted outside of the South.

BUT THEY HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO

14. (C) Local police in Thailand have spent decades perfecting a public persona that emphasizes their corruption and cruelty. For the Region IX police, this has not helped in their efforts to develop informants and win the support of the public. GEN Amporn seems to understand this, to a degree. In a December 2005 meeting with PolOffs, Amporn emphasized the need to interrogate suspected separatists and capture the leaders of the movement who were hiding--according to him--in Malaysia. In a meeting this month (ref B) Amporn instead emphasized the struggle to build local support for the police and Army. "Winning people is key to winning the situation." According to Amporn, his units are engaging in civil affairs projects, such as painting mosques, and Region IX officials have moved "trouble" officers to desk jobs. Police officials are also trying to highlight the role and service of Muslim officers. Some ideas don't appear to be as effective in building public support, however. Amporn is excited about the construction of a new "visitors' center" for the local jail, so that family members and friends of the growing number of arrested suspects may visit their loved ones in increased comfort.

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